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ABSTRACT

This study explored the links between adolescents' family situations and their self-disclosure in peer relationships. Participants were 378 pupils between 16 and 18 years of age and the same number of parents of both sexes. The parents were of different professions: 80 percent belonged to intellectual families and 20 percent to the working class. The study used Jourard's Self-Disclosure Questionnaire (1964), LaGaipa's (1981) Friendship Scale to assess measures of adolescents' and parents' degrees of self-disclosure and to determine and differentiate interpersonal relationships, and the Family Relationship Test by Anthony and Bene to assess family situation. Results suggest that: (1) family situation affects adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with friends; (2) parental influence is particularly significant when the disclosure of information of personal and intimate character is concerned; and (3) the main factors determining adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with friends are the atmosphere of mutual friendliness and frank and direct communication among family members. Contains 10 references. (DR)

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ED 389 386

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ADOLESCENTS' FAMILY SITUATION AND THEIR SELF-DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

The paper aims at determining the links between the adolescents' family situation and their self-disclosure in mate relationships. We have investigated 378 pupils between 16 and 18 years of age and the same number of parents of both sexes. The adoloscents are all pupils of grammar school in Lodz, Poland. The parents are all of different professions: 80% belong to intellectual families and 20% to a working class. Three techniques have been used in this survey, the Jourard's Self-disclosure Questionnaire (1964), the Friendship Scale, LaGaipa (1981) and the Family Relationship Test by Anthony and Bene.

The obtained results allow us to deduce that adolescents with favourable educational situation are less selective in the choice of confidents and their discussions with mates present more details on problems they are interested in than those recruited from the group having unfavourable family relationships. The investigations also show that the links between adolescents' self-disclosure and the family situation are miscellaneous. This depends on the character of interpersonal relationships. So it seems that other factors also influence the adolescents's self-disclosure in mate contacts.

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The role of self-disclosure is often taken into consideration when dealing with emotional relationships within the family. According to the Author' s investigations (see Niebrzydowski, 1985, 1986) on friendship and self-disclosure, it appears that besides the educational atmosphere prevailing at home, other factors have a big influence on adolescents' self-disclosure as well, but these are not the subject of this paper.

The aim of our survey is to find an answer to the question concerning the links between the adolescents' family situation and their self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with their mates.

It has been assumed that:

1. Adolescents with favourable family situation in which parents' attitudes toward children is positive and characterized by self-disclosure in their contacts with the family members or other close to them persons outside the family are less selective in choosing target persons to whom they disclose problems affecting them than the adolescents with unfavourable family situation in which parental attitude toward children is negative.

2. Adolescents brought up in favourable family situation appear to be disclosing a larger number of matters to their mates than those with unfavourable family situation.

3. adolescents' self-disclosure in mate relationships varies according to the type of interpersonal relationship:

a) The strongest link occurs between the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure among acquaintances (newly-known persons).

b) The weakest link occurs between the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure in the contacts with mates called friends.

In the final assumptions, it has also been supposed that the degree of parents" self-disclosure within and outside the family has a substantial influence on the adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates.

PROCEDURE

The survey encompassed 378 pupils between 16 and 18 years of age and the same number of parents. Three methods of research have been used: Jourard' s Self-disclosure Questionnaire (1964), Friendship Scale by LaGaipa (1981) and Family Relationship Test by Anthony and Bene. The first two were considered elementary, the Self-disclosure Questionnaire was used to diagnose the measures of adolescents' and parents' self-disclosure (broadmindedness, intensiveness and selectivity), the Friendship Scale to determine and differentiate interpersonal relationships (acquaintance, comradeship and friendship) , and the Family Relationship Test to investigate parents' attitudes, Anthony and Bene.

ANALYSIS OF THE OBTAINED RESULTS

The investigations conducted on the basis of Anthony and Bene' s Test distinguish two groups of adolescents. The first group comprises the adolescents with favourable family situation from the educational point of view, in which the relationships with the parents are positive or ambivalent. The parents of these adolescents are characterized by normal parental attitudes and self-disclosure within the family as weel as in their contacts with mates. To the second group belong the adolescents who highly estimate the mother and lowly the father, or highly or moderately the mother and lowly the father. The family situation of this group, according to the results obtained on the basis of Anthony and Bene's Test, is considered to be unfavourable. Moreover, the parents of this adolescent group have a low degree of self-disclosure. The data obtained by means of Jourard' s SdQ show the degrees of self-disclosure of these adolescents toward their mates. From these data it appears that 67% of the adolescents under survey with favourable family situation and only 4% of those with unfavourable situation present a low degree of selectivity in choosing the target persons of their disclosure. This means that favourable family situation favours low selectivity. On the other hand, 48% of the adolescents with unfavourable family situation present high or medium degrees of selectivity, that attests high anxiety among this group.

In order to define the relationship between the subjects' parental situation and the profundity of differents bits of information disclosed to mates. we proceeded to the comparison of the degree of self-disclosure between adolescents with favourable and unfavourable family situation

concerning some general topic areas (attitudes, interests, studies) as well as questions related to more intimte spheres (health, personality and financial matters).

According to the data contained in tables 1 and 2, more subjects presenting a low degree of disclosure on low intimate topics are to be found among the group with unfavourable family situation tham amomg those with favourable family situation. The data related to high-intimate topics (financial matters, body and personality) are presented in table 1. It shows clearly that positive family situation favours personal and intimate disclosure while a negative one impedes it.

From the results contained in tables 5 and 6, we can attest that our assumptions made above about the link existing bewteen the family situation and the degree of self-disclosure of adolescent subjects in their contacts with mates is only partly confirmed. The difference between the two groups is not statistically certain. However, what is certain is that the adolescents of the first group (those with positive family situation) more often disclose in a frank and exhaustive way than those of the second group (with negative family situation) whose disclosure is rather general and superficial.

The link between the family situation and adolescents' self-disclosure in contact with mates

To verify the above assumption we comnpared the intensity of adolescents' links within a family with the degree of self-disclosure at successive stages of interpersonal relationship development.. In the case of acquaintance, friendship and comradeship, we have used Spearman' s ranking correlation Q. The results of the adolescents' disclosure of low and high-intimate topics are presented in tables 3 and 4. The obtained correlation value confirms the hypothesis that the intensity of interpersonal relationships within the family determines considerable self-disclosure at different stages of partners' acquaintance. The dependence of self-disclosure degree on family situation is the highest in comradeship and the lowest in acquaintance.

The degree of parents' self-disclosure and adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates

Assuming that parents constitute for the child a model of behaviour in different social situations and that the influence of this model is more or less effective, we can expect a similarity between parents' and children' s behaviours. On the basis of this reasoning, it is assumed that the degree of parents' self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships plays an essential role in shaping the child's self-disclosure in his her contact with mates. To verify this assumption, two groups of adolescents have been distinguished. In the first group there are those whose parents highly or mederately disclose information about themselves to their friends, close or not, and to new acquaintances. The second group includes subjects whose parents have a medium or low degree of self-disclosure.

To do this, we considered sufficient that one of the parents has a high or a low degree of self-disclosure in interpersoonal relationships. Then we compared the degree of parents' self-disclosure with the chidlren' s one. This comparision has beeen conducted by means of Jourard' sSdQ previously used to investigate both parents and adolescents' self-disclosure, The obtained results are preented in table 4.

From table 4, we deduce that the subjects with a low degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates have the parents with a low degree of self-disclosure. In the first group of adolescents, with parents having high or medium degrees of self-disclosure, the number of adolescents with a high degree of self-disclosure is larger in comparison with the other group. It means that a close dependence exists between the degree of parents' and children's self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships

The value Ch2, when df=1, reaches 8.95 at .05 degree of probability attests the statistical dependence. So the above posed hypothesis seems to be confirmed.

Now we put forward the following question: which of the investigated factors that generate parents' self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with adults-emotional links within the family or the degree of mutual self-disclosure between parents and children - has more influence on shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates ? To answer this question we calculated the correlation between the mentioned factors and the degree of self-disclosure of the

parents. The results are presented in table 5.

The obtained value Qxy attests that emotional links within the family play the greatest role in shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (.60), then comes the frank and open way of communication of the subjects with their parents (.50), and finally the degree of parents' self-disclosure in extra-family interpersonal relationships (.39).

These data illustrate adolescents' self-disclosure against a background of family situation. According to these data adolescents have or medium degree of self-disclosure almost a;ways when being grought up in families with a positive situation. In the case of negative family situation, irrespective of the parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships, the degree of adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates is not high but at most medium. In the case of negative family situation and the presence of a low degree of parent's self- disclosure, 64% of the subjects under survey present a low degree of self-disclosure.

Besides, in the case of a high degree of parents" self- disclosure and a negative family situation, there is a lack of both high and low degrees of self-disclosure among adolescents, this perhaps attests an obvious adolescents' criticism and their self-dependent way of thinking since circumspection and criticism become necessary when one cannot rely on his parents. It agrees with the opinion of Derlega and Chaikin(1979) who state that everybody controls the scope of information about himself which he is willing to disclose to the partners of the interaction. This process of controlling selectivity the limits of one's ego, i.e. to which extent we disclose ourselves, is called by them intimacy.

The data presented in table 6 confirm our initial assumptions arguing that parents play an essential role in shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates. However, they can achieve it only if they are accepted by adolescents, which means that positive emotional links exist between them.

FINDINGS

First of all, it is worth recalling that the obtained results confirm most of the initial assumptions, i.e. that the family situation affects considerably adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates. It has also been proved that adolescents living in favourable educational conditions are less selective in choosing the target persons of their disclosure and tend more to disclose intimate information than those living in unfavourable family conditions. However, in the case of disclosing general topics (less intimate) such as attitudes, hobbies, studies, they do not differ from those with other family conditions. The situation changes in reference to the intimate topical areas (personality, health and financial problems), which means that the parental influence is significant when the disclosure of information of more personal and intimate character is concerned. The present survey confirms to a certain degree the resullts obtained by other psychologists (Skarzinska, 1979; Derlega and Chaikin, 1976).

Thus, we can attempt to draw up a kind of family model promoting the shaping of self-disclosure of adolescents in their contacts with mates. The most important element of this model would undoubtedly be the emotional links within the family, then would come the degree of reciprocal disclosure between parents and adolescents and, finally, the parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships. All these elements form what we can call positive and favourable family situation.

As the presented results show, the main factors determining adolescents' self-disclosure in their contacts with mates are the atmosphere of mutual friendliness among the family members and their frank and direct communication.

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TABLES

Table 1: Subjects' family situation and degree of self-disclosure concerning low-intimate categories

Degree of self-disclosure towards mates concerning attitudes, interests and studies	Number of subjects and family situation (in absolute number)	
	positive	negative
Low	9	45
Medium	153	135
High	27	9

Table 2: Subjects' family situation and degree of self-disclosure concerning high-intimate categories

Degree of self-disclosure toward mates	Number of subjects and family situation (in absolute numbers)	
	positive	negative
Low	99	162
Medium	81	27
High	9	0

Table 3: Subjects' family situation and their self-disclosure at different stages of interpersonal relationship development

Subjects' degree of self-disclosure	Stages of interpersonal relationships					
	acquaintance family situation		comradeship family situation		friendship family situation	
	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg
Low	90	171	0	0	0	0
Medium	90	9	54	144	9	63
High	9	9	99	45	99	81
Very high	0	0	36	0	81	45
Total	189	189	189	189	189	189
Correlation Qyx	.37		.5		.22	
	low cor.coef. clear dependence but weak		med.cor.coef substantial dependence		low cor.coef clear dependence but weak	

Table 4: Family situation and the degree of self-disclosure at different stages of interpersonal relationship development in highly intimate categories (numbers and value Q)

Subjects degree of self-disclosure	Stages of interpersonal relationships					
	cquiaintance family situation		comradeship family situation		friendship family situation	
	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.	pos.	neg.
Low	171	189	81	162	0	81
Medium	18	0	81	27	108	57
High	0	0	27	0	36	27
Very high	0	0	0	0	45	27
Total	189	189	189	189	189	189
Correlation Qyx	.22		.57		.32	
	Low cor.coef clear dependence but weak		Med.cor.coef. substantial dependence		Low cor.coef. clear dependence but clear	

Table 5: Extra-familial parents' self-disclosure and subjects' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (in absolute numbers)

Subjects' degree of self-disclosure in contacts with mates	Parents' degree of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships	
	high	low
	(group 1)	(group 2)
Low	0	90
Medium	108	99
High	45	36
Total	153	225

Table 6: Factors shaping adolescents' self-disclosure in contacts with mates (comparison of intensity of influence on the basis of correlation coefficients Q)

Correlation between the degree of self-disclosure of the investigated adolescent in ccontacts with mates and:		
parents self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships with adults	emotional links in the family	mutual self-disclosure of adolescents and parents
Qxy = .39	Qxy = .60	Qxy = .50
$p < .02$	$p < .001$	$p < .001$

Table 7: The influence of parents's self-disclosure on adolescents in contacts with mates

The degree of edolescents' self-disclosure	Family situation			
	positive		negative	
	the degree of parents' self-disclosure in extra-family relationships		the degree of parents self-disclosure in extra-family relationships	
	high (group 1)	low (group 2)	high (group 1)	low (group2)
Low	0	9	0	64
Medium	50	55	100	36
High	50	36	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100